



# GRANDE RONDE MODEL WATERSHED

## Implementation Team Project Proposal Site Tour Evaluation

Project Proposal Name: Little Creek Buffalo Flats

Date: 11/5/24 Subwatershed: \_\_\_\_\_ Tier: \_\_\_\_\_ Rating (H, M, L) \_\_\_\_\_

### Current Fish Use and Life Stage

What are the current fish species and life stages that would be affected by the proposed activities? Will this project improve critical life stage access/habitat?

### Limiting Factors

What limiting factors does the project address? Are there other limiting factors that should be considered in the final proposal?

### Proposed Restoration Activities

What restoration activities are being proposed? Are there additional activities that should be included in the final proposal? Are the activities appropriate for the site?

### Technical Merit

Is the project technically sound (i.e. are goals and objectives well defined)? Are techniques appropriate? Is the cost-benefit ratio suitable? Has there been an appropriate level of planning and design?

This project aims to reconnect the channel of Little Creek to its floodplain and the design approach appears to meet that objective. The utilization of the irrigation system as a bypass during construction is a good idea and allows for quicker and cleaner implementation.

Riparian restoration is an objective for this project. Currently the sponsors are proposing a landowner driven riparian management plan. This plan was presented as to having the floodplain being protected for a period of time and then being allowed to be grazed. While I believe this might be possible, the landowner noted that they were currently grazing in a rotation basis and had been for six years. While I am sure there has been an improvement, during the site visit it was noted woody shrubs and trees were still being suppressed as a result of grazing. There were many cottonwoods and willows along the channel during the site tour that had been grazed or browsed and there were also multiple locations of erosion caused by hoof shear. In looking at the Plan, it discusses Zone 1 as being rested and then eventually grazed. With the requested funding amount, it would be prudent to ask for a minimum of 10 years rest for Zone 1. Another concern is the weeds. The property has some significant patches of highly invasive weeds. We would have concerns exposing the project area to a disturbance of this magnitude without the weed issues addressed. If the landowner is already practicing the land management they propose, they have neglected part of what they talk about in the plan.

Off-channel watering was installed during the summer of 2024 and livestock have not completed a full season yet. Up until this watering system is in full use, livestock have accessed Little Creek for water. With the new LMP in place, livestock will utilize the new watering system and that pressure will be removed from Little Creek.

Zone 1 areas and riparian grasses, shrubs and trees will be excluded from livestock access by electric fencing and herding methods. Rest for Zone 1 will be determined by monitoring vegetation indicators of underutilization or stagnation (measured thresholds) that are resulting in poor vegetation and soil conditions. In those areas that meet those thresholds, grazing will be allowed until utilization thresholds are met, and livestock will be removed.

Invasive and noxious weeds will be addressed during project construction and afterwards for a period of at least 3 years by the Union SWCD. A crew of work inmates are budgeted to hand pull and remove weeds from Zone 1 for up to 2 weeks per year for 3 years. Continued management of weeds by the landowners is expected beyond 3 years following construction.

Given the focal species is Steelhead and it is highly likely this project will have reproduction occurring within the reach, grazing should not be allowed in the riparian area in perpetuity when redds would be present. No grazing will be allowed within Zone 1 during periods of salmonid spawning.

This funding request is high. The amount per yard of material is almost double what we have recently paid. The project does not have a large in water work component and is straightforward as designed. Sponsor should consider refining the budget. The Union SWCD will be working with the GRMW to refine the budget.

### **Recommendations for Improvement/Contingencies**

Sponsor should consider refining the budget. Zone 1 should be protected for 10 years at a minimum. Weeds should be addressed before construction and most likely for multiple years following construction. No grazing of the riparian area should occur when Steelhead redds would be present.

### **Other Comments**